



Business leaders to push for quality preschool education

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KALAMAZOO — Education is the key to Michigan’s climb out of its economic doldrums, business leaders say. And it is increasingly important to start the educational process early. [Steward Sandstrom](#), president and CEO of the Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce, [David Tomko](#), the Southwest Michigan regional president of [PNC Bank](#), and Mike Larson, president and CEO of the Greater Kalamazoo United Way, were expected to be among a cluster of business leaders to discuss a report by Washington, D.C.-based business leaders group [America’s Edge](#) this morning at the [Chamber](#).



The report, "Strengthening Michigan Businesses through Investments in Early Care and Education," indicates that investments in high-quality early care and education “provide a surprisingly big boost to local businesses in Michigan and play an important role in helping the state recover from the economic recession,” according to the Chamber.

During a 10 a.m. news conference at the Chamber of Commerce, the group was to cite findings of the report that show investments in early care and education generate immediate sales of local goods and services, creating jobs.



The group also was expected to call for Michigan’s Congressional delegation to follow Michigan’s state legislature in working to increase funding for early learning programs.

Joining Sandstrom, Tomko and Larson were to be: Sheri Welsh, president of [Welsh & Associates](#) professional recruiting firm, and [Susan Gates](#), national director of America’s Edge.



America's Edge is a private organization supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals and corporations, that tries to identify the knowledge, skills and abilities employers will need their workers to have in the future, according to its website. It then tries to educate policy-makers and business people with that research to effect change. The organization's major funding is provided by [The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#).

[The Learning Network of Greater Kalamazoo](#), a group of seven area entities that was announced in June, has set its sights on improving and expanding Kalamazoo County's current preschool system. That is based on the understanding that high-quality preschool provides a great return-on-investment in terms of improving academic and life outcomes, but that half of Kalamazoo County 3- and 4-year-olds don't attend preschool. Some others attend programs that are little more than glorified babysitting.